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Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda
Substantive discussion on labour mobility and globalisation

Outcome of the in-depth review of labour mobility and globalisation

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Summary

This note provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of labour mobility and globalisation, carried out by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in February 2015.

The in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2015/11), prepared by Austria, summarises international statistical activities related to labour mobility and globalisation, identifies issues and challenges, and makes recommendations on possible follow-up actions in the area.

The in-depth review paper is submitted to the Conference for discussion. Section III suggests the following questions to be discussed at the Conference: 'How to improve collaboration across statistical domains, countries and organizations to improve the measurement of labour mobility?', 'How to harmonize concepts?' and 'What should be done internationally?'.

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I. Introduction

1. Each year, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. These reviews focus on strategic issues and highlight concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.

2. The CES Bureau selected the labour mobility and globalisation for an in-depth review at its meeting in January 2014. Austria drafted the paper that provided the basis for the review. The paper summarised international statistical activities related to labour mobility and globalisation, identified issues and challenges, and made recommendations on possible follow-up actions in the area.

II. In-depth review discussion and decision by the Bureau

3. The Bureau carried out the in-depth review in February 2015 based on the paper by Austria (provided as document ECE/CES/2015/11).

4. The following points were raised in the discussion at the CES Bureau:

(a) The paper provides an excellent review of relevant issues providing a good basis for future work. It was suggested that UNECE should establish a series of working papers to better publicize and promote key documents of excellent quality that can provide an important contribution to international statistical work;

(b) Labour mobility is a complex and challenging topic cutting across a number of statistical domains. The increasing labour mobility in Europe has a growing impact on productivity measurement and national accounts. The data are needed to inform the current political discussion on labour supply and labour market policies, given that the concepts of national borders and residence have become less relevant due to globalization;

(c) There is a lack of harmonization of terms and concepts in this area, such as the terms 'labour mobility', 'migration' and 'cross border movement of workers to provide services' (Mode 4 in WTO terminology);

(d) There is a clear need for a comprehensive framework to cover better the scope of labour mobility and globalization, and to explain the differences between related concepts;

(e) Improving statistics on labour mobility requires both national and international coordination. CES can contribute by bringing together the different work strands and improving coordination of work in this cross-cutting area;

(f) Measurement of labour mobility requires integration of different data sources. As there is a lack of data, use of alternative sources, such as mobile phone records may need to be explored;

(g) Producing mirror statistics and promoting data exchange would be helpful in assessing the current data gaps, quality problems and development needs;

(h) Any work to be carried out under CES on this topic should complement the work conducted by organizations such as ILO, WTO and OECD. ILO suggested that some of the members of a possible CES Task Force on labour mobility would participate in the ILO Working Group on labour migration statistics to ensure good coordination;

(i) The composition of any future task force should include statisticians from different disciplines, both social and economic areas. The work should not be too broad and should focus on achieving practical results. A collection of case studies that illustrate good practices in countries would be useful.

5. The Bureau decided to create a Task Force on Labour Mobility and Globalisation with three main objectives:

(a) Preparing a collection of good practices;

(b) Establishing a framework with common definitions; and

(c) Improving data exchange.

6. The Bureau asked Austria, together with the UNECE Secretariat, to draft the terms of reference for the group by the October 2015 Bureau meeting. Turkey, Eurostat and OECD expressed their interest to participate in the Task Force.

7. The topic of labour mobility and globalisation was selected for discussion at the CES plenary session in June 2015 in Geneva.

III. Key issues to be discussed

8. The following issues emerging from the in-depth review paper are suggested for discussion at the CES plenary session under agenda item 6 (b):

A. How to improve collaboration across statistical domains, countries and organizations?

9. To improve the quality of labour mobility data, collaboration across statistical domains should be strengthened, in particular among tourism, population and labour statisticians. The review illustrated that statistical systems are not yet fully adapted to data needs that cut across the entire statistical system. Improvement in one statistical area can even worsen the data in another area. The Conference is invited to consider how to improve collaboration across statistical domains, for example:

- How to achieve improvement when interdisciplinary collaboration and changes across statistical domains are required? For example, labour statistics would provide better information on labour mobility if migration histories were systematically collected; population statistics would be enhanced if they addressed short-term movements of population; tourism statistics could be better aligned with the requirements of labour statistics and collect data on business travel; better measurement of labour mobility impacts economic statistics, such as measures of productivity;
- To what extent could harmonization of terms and definitions be done in collaboration with the ILO working group on labour migration? The ILO working group on labour migration was newly established in 2015. The group will prepare an agreed definition and inventory of labour migration which will provide an essential basis for further coordination.

B. How to harmonize the concepts?

10. There is a need to integrate the concepts of international labour movements from national accounts statistics and those of international labour migration from social statistics.

The review demonstrated a particular need for developing harmonized concepts and definitions on labour mobility across countries, but the current requirements for individual statistics limit possibilities for improvement. The Conference is invited to consider how to improve the harmonization of concepts, for example:

- To what extent will it be possible to harmonize concepts across statistical domains? Currently, in most countries different labour statistics are produced in separate organizational units based on specific concepts for each statistic that may not consider the bigger picture. For example, it is often not possible to produce statistics on trade in services that would be comparable with social statistics on labour mobility.
- Could ex-post harmonization of methodologies be applied for producing labour mobility statistics? Ex-post harmonisation is based on estimating the impact of differing definitions, such as different durations of stay, from international data of inbound and outbound migration flows, and then correcting these differences by estimation. This strategy has been explored in the European Union on population statistics.

C. What should be done internationally?

11. Major long-term investments may be required to collect new data on labour mobility. It will be essential to make good use of innovative instruments of data collection as well as internationally agreed classifications. The in-depth review paper notes that progress in measuring labour mobility would be possible provided that there is sufficient and formalised international cooperation to bring the work forward. The Conference is invited to consider how to advance this work internationally, for example:

- To what extent would evaluation of mirror statistics between countries be beneficial? This work strand could be pursued in a new Task Force on Labour Mobility and Globalisation to improve international exchange of labour mobility data, as well as to develop statistical models (such as ex-post harmonisation) and definitions of international labour mobility.
- How could innovative data collection techniques be used to improve measurement of labour mobility and migration? The review showed that while international collaboration on labour mobility and trade in services is active, fewer investments are being made to improve data collection. This work strand could be pursued as part of a possible Task Force on Migration Data to explore new, innovative data sources and the use of existing underutilized administrative data, such as social security systems, to better capture temporary migration and improve related labour mobility statistics. A number of countries proposed this area for further work at the 2014 Work Session on Migration Statistics.

IV. Proposal for the Conference

12. The Conference of European Statisticians is invited to discuss the key issues related to labour mobility and globalisation, described in Section III.

13. The CES members are also invited to present their views concerning priorities for the Task Force on Labour Mobility and Globalisation among (or beyond) the following three main objectives:

(a) Preparing a collection of good practices;

(b) Establishing a framework with common definitions; and

(c) Improving data exchange.